

VZCZCXRO0839
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0098 0751749
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 161749Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2523
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 000098

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE FORIEGN MINISTER: ICC INDICTMENT NOT
IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PEACE PROCESS

REF: FREETOWN 79

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for Reason 1.4 (B)

¶1. (U) Foreign Minister Zainab Bangura summoned the Diplomatic Corps on 5 March to inform them that President Koroma was taking a vacation and undergoing a routine medical checkup in New Delhi as a guest of the Indian Government. Bangura also expressed concern that the ICC indictment of Sudanese President Bashir was "not in the interest of the Peace Process" and that President Koroma was considering a state visit to Guinea sometime later in the year.

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Zainab Bangura thanked the diplomatic corps for their "tremendous support" during her tenure at a convocation March 5th. She promised more change at the ministry "whether people like it or not" and noted her new Director General Soulay Daramy (the number three person in the Ministry) was a career diplomat who would greatly assist her in orienting the structure of the ministry to support the President. She noted that the President had followed an exhaustive schedule, and had other trips to look forward to in the near future, including trips to Germany and Guinea. Bangura, who many suspected was likely to lose her job in the Cabinet reshuffle (reftel), seemed much more relaxed than in other recent meetings prior to the reshuffle.

¶3. (U) Bangura stated that the President "needed a break" and was going to India for a much needed rest and a routine medical check-up as a guest of the Indian government. She added that there was no Sierra Leone Embassy in India, no Sierra Leonean population, and his staff had taken his cell phones, which should guarantee a peaceful holiday.

¶4. (C) Turning to international affairs, she predicted that Guinea-Bissau's situation might develop along more favorable lines than in Guinea, as the Army was adhering to the constitution, and the leaders of the competing factions had both been killed. When questioned by the U.S. Ambassador about Guinea, Bangura noted that "there was no good coup" but stopped short of specifically condemning the regime. In answering another question about Bashir's ICC indictment, she noted that it "was not in the interest of the peace process," but avoided any categorical characterization of Sierra Leone's position, only noting that 30 African countries had signed the ICC and the AU would need to address the implications of Bashir's indictment.

¶5. (C) Comment: Having kept her job following the cabinet reshuffle, Bangura appeared relieved and even invigorated; she promised significant changes in the ministry, although one wonders what kept her from making the changes earlier in her administration. Her mention (in an off-hand manner) of a State Visit by Koroma to Guinea was troubling, as it would send a signal that Sierra Leone recognized the junta; even if a visit does not occur, Bangura is still struggling to balance Guinea's stability with the illegitimacy of the regime. On Bashir, one would have hoped for a stronger position in support of the ICC, in light of Sierra Leone's

own experience with civil war and its own international
tribunal, the Special Court for Sierra Leone.
PERRY